

(N.D.)

JUN 18 1960

Approved For Release 2005/07/05 : CIA-RDP15-00149R000700090009-0

Sec 3 N Korea
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Enjoys Baseball



BASEBALL IS ONE FACET of American life that's not new to Francis G. Rowe, former North Korean pilot now teaching engineering at the University of North Dakota. Rowe, who in 1953 defected to the West, bringing his MIG-15 jet plane with him, says he never played baseball with him when he was a boy. He picked the Los Angeles Dodgers as his favorite team. (Herald Photo.)

Defected To West:

UND Instructor Once Red Flier

By MIKE CARRIGAN
Herald Staff Writer

Francis G. Rowe, a former North Korean pilot who defected to the United States in 1953, is now teaching engineering at the University of North Dakota. Rowe, who in 1953 defected to the West, bringing his MIG-15 jet plane with him, says he never played baseball with him when he was a boy. He picked the Los Angeles Dodgers as his favorite team. (Herald Photo.)

On one of 10 such missions, he saw a MIG-15 jet fighter was shot down by the high-altitude American planes.

Rowe was thrust into a new life that September when he was ordered to defect to the West.

The downing of Francis G. Rowe and his spy plane over Soviet territory in early May and the resulting collapse of the summit conference that followed, however, added a new dimension to the 7-year-old mystery flights.

Rowe said here last week that he's now convinced that the planes which so easily eluded him over Manchurian skies in 1953 were forerunners of Powers' U-2 spy plane.

Praises U.S. Pilots

"The pilots of these American planes were very good," he reported, "and had perhaps 10 times the flying experience I did. The planes must have carried superior radar warning devices and other equipment to evade capture."

The former pilot, who once reported to be a poet, admits he never actually sighted any of the early spy planes. But he insists the Communists knew the kinds of aircraft to expect over their territory because of tips from Red agents.

He said Communist spies trained to report flights northward from U.S. bases were stationed at most air strips in South Korea.

Saw Spy Photos

Rowe offered as proof of the effectiveness of this spy network the fact that as a fledgling pilot at the North Korean Air Force Academy in 1950, he was shown close-up photographs, taken from many angles, of all U.S. planes then in use.

He stressed that he didn't think the planes he was ordered to shoot down were the same as that used by the bombers, "because such planes are known to constantly improve over the years."

The spy planes seemed capable of about the same, or perhaps a little better performance, than the MIG-15 — which by his estimate were then able to fly at 16,000 feet and at speeds of one and a half times the speed of sound.

\$100,000 Reward Offered

The best fighter the Americans could put into the air at this time was the F-86, he claimed, which when fully armed could not fight above 14,000 feet. The great difference in fighting capability between the two jet fighters was the reason Gen. Mark Clark, then commander of U.N. Forces in the Far East, offered the \$100,000 reward that Rowe collected for turning over the first MIG-15 jet.

The 1948 graduate of Columbia University has steadily denied that the \$100,000 reward had any thing to do with his defecting to the West.

"I loved America and wanted to get away to join the free world," he claimed when interviewed in the living room of the modest two-story farm home where he lives with his 55-year-old mother.

Rowe, who doesn't define democracy along strictly geographic lines, applauded the twin collapses of the Rhee regime in Korea and the Monrovia administration in Turkey and said both men "only paid the penalty for suppressing the freedom of people in their countries."

He maintains he planned to flee Communism long before entering the North Korean Air Force Academy in 1950. He also says he never shot down an American plane and brought along his flight log to prove it.

He did admit engaging in "mock" combat with U.S. planes on his nearly 65 combat missions but insists he never hit any.

Nearly Loses Life

On five occasions this kind of airborne "Russian roulette," nearly cost him his life. On one of the five times he was tailed by American fighters he said he could see bullets piercing the air over his cockpit.

U.S. agents, after his defection, never suspected him as a spy, he explained, "because the Communists have better methods of placing their agents than by being accompanied by a top-secret weapon."

Asked if it would not be a simple matter to fake the flight log he returned with him, Rowe replied that American intelligence agents are competent to judge whether documents had been altered.

Flew 66 Missions

His poor record of "kills" led to no doubts of his loyalty to Communism, among his superiors, he claimed, because "just surviving more than 60 combat missions was considered heroic."

He also denied vehemently, as he had previously, that he ever saw leaflets offering the \$100,000 reward ordered dropped over North Korea.

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